# Interview with Thomas B. Killeen

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

THOMAS B. KILLEEN

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[Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. Killeen.]

SUMMARY: This history of Thomas B. Killeen focuses on his three tours in refugee work: in Vietnam in 1969-71, in Bangkok about ten years later, and then in Somalia. Killeen generally has positive things to say about the host country nationals and authorities; he is more critical of some of his American counterparts, particularly the U.S. military in Vietnam. It is clear from Killeen's account that refugee work was often a make-shift and under-supported operation. Nevertheless, improvisation and the hard and imaginative work of people like Killeen got a lot accomplished.

*Q: Could you tell me a little about your background. Where were you born and educated?*

KILLEEN: I was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and grew up in that area. I was born September of 1940; World War II was about to begin. I was the first child, the first of six boys in the family. My father served in the Marine Corps during World War II and that occasioned the dislocation of family as it did for everybody. We moved from the Wilkes-Barre area to Scranton and then after the War, when my father came home from the war, we moved to a place northeast of Scranton called Carbondale. I stayed there until I was age ten, then back to Scranton, and I stayed in Scranton until I was just about twenty.

During that period I was educated by the good sisters — Catholic education, parochial schools — for primary school. High school was the Jesuits at the Scranton Preparatory School. I started at the University of Scranton when I graduated from my preparatory school and at the end of my third semester at the University of Scranton I went into the Marine Corps. I was in the Marine Corps for four years; during that time I was stationed at Parris Island, where everybody goes, and then at Camp Lejeune for a while. Then I came up here to Washington — I am not giving every stop along the way — and while stationed here in Washington I went to school here at Georgetown. I finished with the Marine Corps and then I went back to Scranton and finished university there at Scranton.

*Q: You went into the Peace Corps, didn't you? From 1964 to 1966 you were in Chile?*

KILLEEN: That is correct, I went into the Peace Corps.

*Q: Why did you go into the Peace Corps?*

KILLEEN: Some of it was the times. I suppose for a lot of reasons, not the least among which is that I am an Irish-American and John Kennedy appealed to me, to a lot of us, very much. When he announced the Peace Corps I even went so far as to see if I could get a transfer from the Marine Corps to the Peace Corps. I didn't make a stink about it but I made inquiries about it. When my time in the Marine Corps was over and I was through with the university, I was twenty-three years of age. I had what was in those days one's military obligation out of the way, in a very real sense I was ahead of my contemporaries. The Peace Corps was there and I thought it would be a good thing to do that kind of service, the kind of service that the Peace Corps was advertising itself to be. In addition, I suppose we all have some sort of private motives, I had an interest in foreign affairs; interest in foreign service for want of a better term, and thought that the Peace Corps would be a good and rather painless way, for all parties, to see whether of not I really did care for that living abroad. In 1964, the early 1960's, the third world was really quite clearly

the third world and the first world the first world; those distinctions are no longer as true. But in those days I didn't know whether or not I might want...

*Q: Where did you serve in Chile and what were you doing in the Peace Corps?*

KILLEEN: I was in Santiago and I was part of an experimental program. It was a very interesting thing : the experiment was a success, the program was a failure. The Peace Corps Director for Latin America at the time was a fellow by the name of Frank Mankiewicz, from the movie-making family, who subsequently was an aide to Bobby Kennedy and these days is a lobbyist around Washington. He had a lot of ideas. Our particular project — a two-group project — was to do urban community development and that was, more specifically, pre-political organization of poor people, little people, to try to bring them into the political process. I was the first group and after I had been in Chile for about a year another group came behind us to do the same thing. The two groups clearly demonstrated, the way I saw it and others did too, that foreigners just couldn't do that kind of stuff, that is go into a place and try to organize people. No matter how much in fact we were trying to stay away from anything that was overtly political, we were in fact foreigners. We didn't know what the hell was going on, we didn't know how to even perceive local problems let alone start to resolve them. And I am talking about the people, the volunteers, who were oriented to do something like that. The trauma, the culture shock or whatever you want to call it, is taking somebody fresh out of university and putting him into not just a slum, but a foreign slum, where nobody spoke English, where there was considerable hostility in the environment. I speak of a natural hostility — angry dogs, an astronomical death rate, infantile mortality rate.

A couple of people in my group literally couldn't get out of the house. There was one guy who, he was a nice enough fellow, could only keep house for his roommate. There was nothing homosexual about the relationship, he just couldn't bring himself to get out of the house. A couple of times a week during the height of the day he would walk two blocks and go shopping at a supermarket kind of arrangement and once a week he would go into

town to take a bath. Other than that he stayed in the house, stayed in bed a fair amount of the time sleeping and reading. Another guy divorced himself from the community in which he was living and supposed to be working and got himself in with the country club set. He was very gifted athletically and he was on all the teams of the country club. Nice enough fellows in every case but they couldn't get any further into the local community than that; they couldn't do this kind of pre-political organization that we were supposed to do. Very few of us could do any of it. It demonstrated pretty clearly, both my group and the following group, that it couldn't be done. To the best of my knowledge the Peace Corps has never even attempted to do it again. Now obviously it would take a certain amount of real gumption on the part of an administrator to try to get together a group of people to do that. Your administrator would have to be somebody like a Frank Mankiewicz. Your ordinary bureaucrat would not think of anything that could be so explosive in the local situation. The U.S. Ambassador at the time was a fellow by the name of Ralph Dungan, who was not a Kennedy appointee but a Johnson appointee because he was one of the Kennedy speech-writers. Johnson sent him off to Chile — not entirely in exile, but sort of — and he was sympathetic to the kinds of things we were trying to do. He even came out to the particular Chilean slum in which I was working to have a meal and see what the place was like.

*Q: I take it that in the long run, even with this being tossed into the deep end, you still wanted to get in the foreign service?*

KILLEEN: Yes, and just on that angle, although this was by no means an important consideration, I said to myself “If that's the worst that the world out there can throw at me, and it is, then the rest of it will be nothing but a piece of cake.” And of course my first assignment with the State Department was to Vietnam. I, at that time being absolutely a hard core dove, thought the United States was making a terrible mistake.

*Q: Even as an ex-Marine?*

KILLEEN: Oh, even while I was a Marine. When I was a Marine, the Commandant was a fellow by the name of Shoup, who was one of those guys who had absolutely impeccable credentials. He had won a Congressional Medal of Honor for leading an assault wave in a battle called Tarawa in the Pacific. He did not sign on with the Vietnam business. To the extent that there was support for operations in Vietnam within the U.S. military, the Air Force had considerable enthusiasm about things, and the U.S. Army had enthusiasm about things. The Marine Corps had very little enthusiasm, although they were the first ones to be committed as ground troops. No, even while I was in the Marine Corps, even as far back as 1962, I was opposed to what was going on in Vietnam; and I was increasingly so as we became aware of what was going on in Vietnam.

*Q: How did you get into the Foreign Service?*

KILLEEN: The testing procedure, while I was in Chile. It was actually sort of funny, and I don't tell this story to pat myself on the back, but I said to myself that while I was there in Chile, I would be there eighteen months, I would have the opportunity to take the exam three times. So I signed up to take it and passed it the first time through which then just gave me a couple of days after I was through with the Peace Corps to take the oral examination. Had I not taken the oral examination within that fairly short window I would have had to go through the written examination again.

*Q: How did the Vietnam assignment come out?*

KILLEEN: When we assembled as a class...

*Q: In 1967?*

KILLEEN: This is the first working day after 1967 began. I think our class was seventy-six. The leadership of the class, to the extent that the matter came up, assured us that nobody in the class was going to Vietnam, that was just not in the cards. And apparently during the course of our six-week A-100 course there was a change, and part of the change

came about because USAID was really having considerable difficulty. They couldn't recruit people to staff the jobs that they had in Vietnam, and they had to get people elsewhere. The State Department was tasked with providing some warm bodies, with getting on board with the Vietnam effort. Along about midway in our A-100 program the leaders stopped talking about nobody going to Vietnam, and nobody was asking anymore because it had been thoroughly answered. So that the day the assignments were out — I can't remember what the fellow's name was, but it doesn't make any difference who it was — they began to read in alphabetical order the members of the class and what their assignments were and somebody whose name began with “B” or maybe “C”, bang! — Vietnam. There was a deep intake of breath in the room. They went down the list and somebody who had brought his wife, his name came up for Vietnam, and she started to cry. As soon as the first name came up for Vietnam, I knew that if anyone was going to go to Vietnam, I would — a bachelor, that gives them fifty points, former peace corps volunteer, that gives him another fifty points, former Marine, that gives him another fifty points, he's gone. I knew as soon as the first name came up that I was going to go and that the choice before me was either to stand up and just walk out of the class right then, and in effect to resign, or to go to Vietnam. So, of course, when my name came up that was the assignment. Prior to that we had had some kind of consultation with our personnel assignment people. You know, “Where would you like to go, KILLEEN?” I said, “I don't care, any place in the world except don't send me to East Asia because I have no interest in that part of the world.” And didn't; not anyplace, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, India; I had no interest in that part of the world. “And,” I said, “I have just come from South America so I am not anxious to go there, send me to someplace new; I am not anxious to go to Europe either, so Africa sounds fine, or wherever is fine.” I wasn't too picky; I never was picky about assignments in the Foreign Service, what came up came up, that was fine.

*Q: Well you served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1969. What did you do?*

KILLEEN: Refugee work?

*Q: Where were you working?*

KILLEEN: I worked for a couple of months in a city called Hoi An, which was about 20 miles south of Da Nang. And then when the Tet offensive broke out there in January of 1968, the fellow who was doing refugee work in Hue was killed...

*Q: What was his name?*

KILLEEN: Jack Lunstead (?). He was killed, he was killed in his bathtub as a matter of fact. He apparently tried to take refuge in his bathtub, and the communists, who weren't very many, did go door to door on some things and they weren't going to allow anybody to do that and that was the end of him. Anyway, there I was twenty miles south of Da Nang and once again I was a former Marine and if anybody was going to Hue to be the refugee officer, I was going. Because it was, as it was said and explained and in the things they sought, a matter of high policy of the United States that we, the United States, would not give up the former imperial capital of Vietnam and we would not let the people displaced by war activities go unhelped (sic). And we would be seen visibly helping even if at the particular moment the only visible sign of our help was the person of a refugee officer. So I went on up to Hue, and I went up to Hue twelve or thirteen days before the communists were kicked out.

*Q: This was during the long Marine assault on the fortress there? The capitol building with the walls around it.*

KILLEEN: The Marines were involved, the 101st Airborne Division was also involved and the South Vietnamese First Infantry Division, which was actually based in that area, was also involved. I have got a photograph, and I swear I am certain about my own recollection of it, that is a picture of the U.S. flag raised over the front gate of that wall by the Marines in violation of all policy orders and instructions and which was quickly removed. But I got a picture of that. That was some pretty hard sledding, that whole business. I went up to Hue,

as I say it was over thirteen days before the communists got kicked out. I was there for a bit, and then I went south to a refugee place that was north of the Marine base at Phu Bai and I shuttled back and forth.

*Q: What were you doing? You not only had the problem of Hue, but was that also the time when they were cleaning out the Montagnards, getting them out of the area?*

KILLEEN: No, oh no. And you have a little bit of the wrong slant on that. What you are thinking about, I think, and please don't be offended if I am putting words in your mouth, is: There were two distinct populations in Vietnam by broad group, one was the ethnic Vietnamese and the other was the mountain tribes. There was considerable antipathy between the people with the Vietnamese being the dominant group and the Montagnard population being largely content to let the Vietnamese have it all as long as they had peace and quiet in their own mountains. In those mountain areas, around some of the U.S. special forces camps, Montagnard populations did congregate; but to the best of my knowledge there was never any effort to move those peoples, in anything like a refugee guise, out of those areas and into the lowlands. There were some efforts to resettle them.

*Q: Well I am really talking about resettlement more than anything, because I visited a couple of those.*

KILLEEN: Of the Montagnards?

*Q: I swear they were Montagnards, up near Hue, but towards the mountains. But we don't need to get into this. You were dealing with refugees, where were they coming from?*

KILLEEN: They were from the city of Hue. The city of Hue got beat up pretty badly during the fighting. I just remember some rough numbers; the population was something like 138,000 people, 125,000 of them registered for refugee benefits. Something on the order of maybe 27,000 homes and dwellings, and something like 25,000 of them were either partially or entirely damaged or destroyed for purposes of collecting refugee benefits.

It was refugee and rehabilitation. Specifically what I was doing was to try to, along with others — by others I mean their own hierarchy — to get the Vietnamese Refugee Service to do its work in getting the benefits into the hands of the beneficiaries, the people who were designated by law or regulation as beneficiaries. In order to do that there was a matter of registration, there was a matter of distribution, there was a matter of getting supplies, there was a matter of getting monies. The provincial treasury had been looted by the liberating forces; they had liberated the provincial treasury as well. Some things were as basic as that, we had to get food and money in, cash money, in order for the provincial treasury to operate, in order for civil servants to be paid, in order for beneficiaries of this refugee and rehabilitation package to get their cash benefits. Physically the cash money had to come in from out of town, from the capital.

As a matter of mechanics, some of what I did was to be a parallel channel of communications. If the Vietnamese service that I was attached to, advising, requisitioned something, I would pass through my channels of communication to the advisor to the Ministry in Saigon the fact that the request had been made and to move it along. And that is what would happen. If it was a matter of personnel, if it was a matter of material, if it was a matter of money, if it was a matter of awards, a matter of decorations, a matter of all kinds of things, I could use this parallel line of communication, and the converse was true. If there was something that was decided in the Ministry, a program to be initiated, this or that or the other thing, it could get passed down through American lines of communication to me and I could bring it to the attention of the local folks, who would often act upon the message that I was bringing because it was reliable. Sometimes they would act upon it by resisting, but they would act upon it. Sometimes they asked for things that I judged to be something less than crucial and I would say, “This is on the way, but I don't agree with it,” or words to that effect. In saying things that way I sort of implied that it was much more a tug-of-war, relationships were pretty good and we were pretty much on the same wave length.

*Q: What was your impression of the Vietnamese bureaucracy that you dealt with?*

KILLEEN: Pretty good, genuinely pretty good. Pretty much dedicated to their war aims — save the country, build a country, make a country aims; their anti-communist aims. But in saying that I should make note that the bureaucracy, the ordinary clerk, was drawn from the best educated population in Vietnam — the most intrepid and independent population in Vietnam, the group of people who had the highest sense of their own worth and the elevation of their place — who were in fact angry that their city had been so beat up by their fellow countrymen. I say it that way and it implies that I am thinking of the physical property. Yes, some of it was the physical property; obviously the guys that beat up the property, the real estate, in a way were us, the Americans, the westerners, the South Vietnamese who were on our side. But it was the communists who came in, and really did kill an awful lot of the people of Vietnam. Killed maybe 2500 or 2900 while they were occupying Hue and then marched off an equivalent number, maybe it was only 2500, out into the wastelands to the east where they clubbed them and buried them alive. The people of Hue were pretty much universally angry about that, and they remained angry, they remained angry so that — God, I am jumping ahead a long time — more than ten years later a fellow was released from a reeducation camp, went home to Hue where he was dealing with local clerks. He decided he didn't want to stay in Vietnam anymore, he wanted to go and immigrate to the United States. So he went around, because he had heard about a program, the orderly departure program, to the local clerk — this is the story he told me — who was also from Hue. I say clerk, but he was a middle level bureaucrat. He said, “Yes, I heard about that program, let me see what I can find out for you about it,” and walked this guy who had come out of reeducation camp through every bit of procedure without bribe or fine or anything like that. He was, in the current term, a home boy and he got him out of Vietnam. He was working for the communists, a communist functionary, but he was still angry at those guys who had beaten up the city of Hue so badly, and its people.

*Q: What was your impression of dealing with the American military while you were there.*

KILLEEN: Terrible, absolutely terrible. I didn't have much dealings with the Marines, I had dealings with the Army. I found some of their ways of doing business just impossibly obtuse, when not just plain flat craven. And it went on at all kinds of levels. I am going to try to build a little bit with stories. I got a ride on a helicopter and I told the fellow I wanted to go to a certain place and he said no, he couldn't take me there, that it was too dangerous and so on and so forth, that it was not a combat required priority to land there to put me down so he wouldn't do it. Well the next day I got an Air America helicopter to put me down in the same place...

*Q: This was the CIA run airline. But basically it was sort of civilian type airline.*

KILLEEN: Yes, not U.S. Army, it was a different chain of command. He put me down there without the slightest hesitation. That's where the customer wants to go, that's where we go, down we went. I told him to go away and come back and get me in half an hour and he said sure he would come back in half an hour and when I wanted him to land to put out a smoke grenade. I did and he landed and we left. Because what we were talking about was a compound that was not a hundred yards square and everything outside the compound, I don't mean to give the impression of guys with guns pointed, was unfriendly territory. The opposite story, another Army helicopter and I asked him to put me down in a particular place and he did. When we got down or as we were landing, I said “Now you better get the hell out of here. Get out and come back and pick me up in a half hour.” “No, no, no, I'll wait for you.” “No, no, no, get out of here.” “No, I'll wait for you.” “Son of a gun get out of here, if you won't come back for me in a half hour then don't come back at all, but get out.” He started to raise from the ground and he was not 50 feet in the air, I was walking away, when a .60 millimeter mortar landed where he had been. Nobody was hurt, but when it landed I looked up, he was looking down and his eyes were about as big as that television monitor. He hadn't wanted to listen to me, he wanted to be obtuse about things. We then took off and I said to him something about “you didn't want to believe me, but I guess now

you will," he did come back and get me, and he said "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." I said to him something quite casual about how "most of this area in here is controlled by communists." At which point we flew out over the ocean and traversed the thirty or forty miles that we had to go to get back to Hue over the ocean and then cut inland to come into Hue to let me off.

I made those stories sort of rudimentary and sort of yuk-yuk stories because as far as I am concerned they illustrate some of the kind of things that happened. The fellow that I worked for was actually a U.S. Army colonel and I had a fair amount of respect for him. He had a principal deputy who was an Army lieutenant colonel for whom I had an awful lot of respect. The rest of the crew, there was a military deputy, the principal deputy, and then there was a civilian deputy who was a former Army officer. Most of this provincial advisory team were either active duty or retired military officers. A lot of those guys were fairly obvious retreads. I think that on balance the folks that were being sent to that particular provincial advisory team were the best available — I am not talking about myself. Although maybe I should put myself in just that same category stressing the available part of it. The former senior advisor to the province was a guy by the name of Phil Manhard and he was a State Department foreign service officer, now dead.

*Q: No he's not. I am pretty sure he is not because I interviewed him, not on this but on China; I think he is in North Carolina now. I may be wrong, but it must have just happened just recently.*

KILLEEN: And you think he formerly worked in the city of Hue?

*Q: He was captured. Later Ambassador to Fiji or Mauritius, something like that.*

KILLEEN: Well I thought that I had seen that he had died. I don't know if he knows this story, and I don't know that it's true. The communists took over Hue by maybe a battalion of them walking into town during the course of a night, and the next thing anybody knew if there was any cop on the corner, or someone who looked like a cop on the corner, it

was a communist. They found themselves in control of the city and called in their buddies who then marched on in in greater force. But during that particular period, which was the evening of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, one of the guys who worked for Manhard, a guy by the name of Augustino (?), was sleeping over with a girl friend right across the street from the U.S. Army's MACV compound where the Army advisory team to the First Vietnamese Army Division was lodged. Augustino found out, maybe he did so by looking or maybe by the one of the Vietnamese with whom he was staying telling him, that Manhard had not been taken. He went across the way to this MACV compound and asked them if they would give him a squad to go and pick up Manhard before the communists got him. And they refused; they refused to let anyone go out. So Augustino, as he told the story, as I remember, tried arguing with them for a little while and it sort of became a question of “You can come in if you want to, but you are not going to go out again. We are not going to open the gates for you to go out again. We are not going to open the gates for any other reason, including any kind of thing to go and get Manhard.” Augustino at that point went to see if he could get Manhard, it was a matter of about three blocks, by himself before the communists got there. He found that they had already been there, or were circling in at the moment and he couldn't get to him.

This same MACV compound — I think the commander of it was a colonel by the name of Kelly — that doesn't sound right — I don't remember. Maybe a mile away from where this compound was there was a little outpost where there were twelve soldiers headed by a sergeant. They were running the telephone lines and they asked the compound to let them come in so that they could get some food and water, or to send food and water, and the compound wouldn't do it. They were told to stay where they were, and they stayed where they were throughout the occupation of the south side of the city of Hue by the communists, which was, I guess, ten days or two weeks, without food or water. They didn't have any there on their little compound because they customarily took their meals at the MACV compound. They were kept alive, both by food and by water, by the madame of a local bordello at considerably greater peril to her life than in fact those communicators

were. She ran food and water to them and kept them alive. In the meantime this MACV compound wouldn't let them in, told them to stay where they were. And they did and they kept those telephone lines open. I put that down as just plain craven conduct on the part of that MACV compound. There probably were, if not more, at least the equivalent number of troops — not organized into combat units — in that MACV compound as actually captured the city of Hue. They offered no resistance whatsoever, there may have been a couple of rounds popped off at some point or another.

I didn't actually realize this until sometime later as our compound was independent, it was several blocks away from the MACV compound. The CIA compound was across the street from us. We never abandoned our compound and they never abandoned their compound and I am confident in retrospect that part of the reason we didn't abandon our compound was because we weren't sure we could get out of the MACV compound once we had gotten in and quite literally had to get out of the compound in order to do the work we were there to do. That was, of course, true of MACV and they didn't come out of their compound.

*Q: Did you spend all your time with refugees through the 1969 period?*

KILLEEN: Yes. I took a couple of R & R's, but that was what I did and I did it there in the city of Hue and in the provinces.

*Q: Did you have any feeling of being in the Foreign Service, this was your first assignment, or were you sort of off on your own?*

KILLEEN: Such a question. You see I didn't really know against what to judge things. I knew I wasn't working in an Embassy, on the other hand I didn't have a clue what working in an Embassy was. It certainly didn't seem unnatural that a number of us would be separated out and detailed to USAID. During the course of the A-100 course, but apparently without any connection, the stories of other officers in Vietnam, both USIS officers and State officers, who were working in the provinces were told. They were told

as some of the kinds of things that individuals sometimes get in to. We all knew of, and I certainly was dazzled by it, one-man posts — there are still a couple of them left. The one that I had run into ..(?).., well as I said dazzled by this little jewel, was the one-man post at Antofagasta, Northern Chile.

I was more than a little happy that I was able to get up into northern part of Vietnam where the Marines were. I felt a little safer in Marine country, because I could speak the language, than I would have elsewhere — although I had a cousin who was working for ESSO in Saigon. There were no other State Department officers in Hoi An when I went there, but there were a couple of AID officers. The fellow who was the senior advisor in Hoi An when I was there was a CIA officer. There were a couple of AID officers and there may have been a USIS officer who was holding down the USIS slot. I am trying to remember and I haven't thought of these things in years. There was at least one military officer detailed to holding an AID slot in Hoi An. So then the world fell apart with the communists virtually overwhelming the country, it didn't really surprise me that when I was sent to Hue — when I say it that way I was conscious of the fact that there was history being made there and it was an attraction to me to be close to it, that sweetened the things on going to Hue — there were no other State officers in Hue at the time. There were CIA officers. Were there any civilian AID officers there beside the guy who was the retired army officer? I don't remember whether there were or not. But although he was a retired military officer he was, in fact, retired and was engaged by AID as a civilian employee. There had been Manhard who was there two weeks before I got there and was no longer there, but we really did have hopes at that time that he would either show up or be recovered. He was a State Department officer. There had been a consulate in Hue three or four years before I got there. There was an AID officer there who was an ordinary civilian. I didn't really have too much to judge it against. I knew that I was not dealing with a normal Embassy assignment; I didn't know how far afield it was. In fact I was part of CORDS 1; I and five others were part of CORDS 1 before there was CORDS. We were part of OCO and then OCO became CORDS and it was CORDS when it was the days of Civil Operations and

Revolutionary Development Support, long before it got changed to Rural Development or anything like that.

*Q: What about corruption? In the Far East and many other places you pay for services before you receive them often from the public. Or things are siphoned off; there was a lot of talk about the Vietnamese general in command of I Corps, how he had warehouses full of stuff. Did you have any experience with corruption?*

KILLEEN: I didn't see it. I thought at the time, and still think, that because of the spotlight under which we were — which was pretty intense; I even got a reporting requirement from the White House, came out of the White House, direct telex; and the Vietnamese were under the same spotlight — it just didn't happen.

Now you have to bear in mind, and this is not intended as a big but, that what we were about was to put into the hands of little people certain limited amounts of foodstuffs, cement, tin roofing, and cash — there wasn't a lot of cash involved, though in aggregate it was, for individuals it wasn't. It wouldn't have taken a very dumb merchant or corruptee to figure out that once you get it into the hands of people you can then come around behind them and buy the stuff back, and, in fact, use the same trucks to take it back that brought it up. I never saw anything like that happen, either. I felt, and I think we felt, that once we got it into the hands of people that we had done the very best that we could do. By people, I mean the people who were entitled by law, or what was passing for law, to be the beneficiaries of this stuff.

There was one kind of a thing that was maybe sort of an exception on that, it was after the communists had been kicked out but it wasn't very long after. One evening this same Augustino that I mentioned earlier was seen going off someplace with an M16 over his shoulder. “Where in the hell are you going, Augie?” He said he was going to guard the warehouse. “What the hell are you worried about the warehouse for?” “They” had broken in or at least broken through a wall, and he was afraid that they were going to come back

that night and pillage it. What was in the warehouse at that point, there may have been very small quantities of something else, was bulgur which was not a very attractive food stuff for the Vietnamese, being a rice eating people. This bulgar had a certain amount of popularity in the Middle East, but it was totally alien to the Vietnamese population. Well, everybody, what there was of a provincial advisory team, jumped up on their feet and said, “No, no, no, you can't do that,” and we then proceeded to have a quick but fairly intense discussion of what it was all about. We came to the conclusion that absolutely the best thing that could happen was that this bulgur would be stolen, and that the next thing that would happen would be that it would be sold. That would begin to reestablish market places in the city of Hue which would then draw other kinds of things and we would take that particular step toward reconstituting the city as a living thing. We prevailed upon Augustino to sleep on his own bed that night — I don't know what he was sleeping on, maybe a desk as most of us were. And that is exactly what did happen. Now was that corruption on our part?

*Q: No, there was a practical application of how do you insert something into the society, sometimes its leaving something on a street corner and saying “Oh my, they have taken it.” This belongs to that rather than somebody getting and stockpiling something that really is of great value and creating money.*

KILLEEN: I never had any dope offered to me for sale, I never went looking for any. I heard about marijuana being available, I heard about one guy walking down the street with two AWOL bags full of marijuana. This was before heroine became widespread.

*Q: When I was in Vietnam, which was 1969 and 1970, a little marijuana, but it wasn't a big deal. That wasn't the problem.*

KILLEEN: Again, I think really that both the Vietnamese and the American side, to the extent that it may have applied to the American side, really put [a big effort] into the city of Hue... You see there was a new provincial chief because the previous one had been

terrible, hid out in the attic of the hospital when the communists came into the town. The South Vietnamese government because of the glare of the spotlight, because of the terrible conditions that all of a sudden prevailed, put honest, upright, reliable, dedicated, nationalistic people into the city of Hue to supervise. Pretty much upright, remnants of the Vietnamese civil service that were left.

*Q: You left Vietnam in April of 1969, is that right?*

KILLEEN: April of 1969 it was.

*Q: What had you been asking for and where did you end up going?*

KILLEEN: I hadn't really been asking for anything, except as something on a wish list when I first came into the foreign service. First of all, I didn't really know that I was going to make it out of Vietnam. Three of us had Thanksgiving dinner together, three State Department officers. I went to Hue, another guy went to Kontum, or Pleiku it may have been, another one was in Saigon as part of the Embassy political section. He had come from the U.S. mission to the U.N.; he was by misadventure in Hue at the time the Tet offensive broke out and was scooped up by the communists — he was knocked down a block or so away from the compound in which I ended up living and working and shot in the back of the head. The business about onward assignments and everything else like that I didn't give much if any thought to or consideration to, some of it was just because it was so far away and Washington was so far away and the Embassy was so far away, and I was busy and in a sense it was easier to be far away.

What actually happened was that a brother of mine died and I went back to the United States to go to the funeral. Then what transpired was one of those things that put the department's personnel system into my heart and to this day it remains very difficult for me to say anything against personnel. Quite literally at about 10:00 o'clock in the morning my supervisor told me that my brother had died and did I want to try to make it to the funeral. The message from the family made it quite clear that they understood that I was very far

away and in a remote place far away. The funeral was set for, call it forty-eight hours and if I couldn't make it just let them know; they were not going to hold the funeral until I arrived — although that's not the phraseology of it at all. Well I set off then to make it and literally packed an AWOL bag and that was it. After the funeral I took a couple of days off and I got a phone call from — I'm not even sure who it was — personnel and they offered me a deal. The deal was that if I wanted to go back to Vietnam of course I was welcome to, but if I didn't want to, then the department would TDY me to the Vietnam training center for a month and that would formally complete my assignment in Vietnam making me eligible for home leave and onward assignment. And I opted to do that, which meant that the folks back in Vietnam had to pack up for me. In that same period, which in my mind was about the time I was going to be doing it anyway, when I got back to Washington I would talk about an onward assignment. That is when I did it and once again I sort of got myself if not in trouble, out of joint, because I made some wrong assumptions.

When we were going off to Vietnam, the personnel folks had said, in effect, thank you all very much for doing this and take it from us, when you are finished with your Vietnam assignment you will have any assignment you want. I believed it. When I then went shopping for an assignment what I wanted was something in the Middle East so I could see what that particular area of the world was like. The assignment that came up, and I thought nothing of it, was to long-term language training in Beirut. In my mind, having in fairly short succession and at government expense, put it in those terms, had some language training in Spanish for the Peace Corps, had some language training in Vietnamese for the State Department but for AID because they loaned me out, I was now getting language training for the State Department. It took me a couple of months and some consultation, not consultation, he more than sought me out, he looked me up — I can't think of a good phrase — a guy by the name of Perry Culley, who was an Inspector and had been the DCM in Paris, said to me in effect do you know what you are doing. I said , “Yeah, sure. A little R&R from Vietnam and studying some Arabic in preparation for another assignment.” He said, “Do you realize it's not just another assignment, that it is

probably two more and then back to Washington and then very likely another assignment in the Middle East, because you're taking this language course." I hadn't; I had sort of thought of it as the Vietnam thing. So that is how I got to the Middle East and the assignment process was in a very real sense the Department of Personnel folks fulfilling their commitment to us who had gone to Vietnam to give us anything we wanted. When I said I wanted to go to the Middle East, there being no jobs open, they put me into a language course. I am sure whoever made the decision to do that said, "Of course he will appreciate that he is slated for long-term assignment in the area." I didn't. When I found out I asked that I be recycled out of the long-term and into an abbreviated language course and that then I get an onward assignment. When I was finished with the language course, lo and behold if a guy in Tel Aviv did not take advantage of a thing we then had in the foreign service where you could retire and get additional credit for retirement.

*Q: Yes, there were these periods of time to encourage retirement.*

KILLEEN: And he did that out of the blue and there is some poor guy back in Washington looking at Tel Aviv and saying, "Where in the hell am I going to find someone to go into a consular job in Tel Aviv a couple of months before the summer?" And probably the same guy saying, "What am I going to do with KILLEEN who now needs an assignment to an Arabic speaking post," only to discover that Arabic is co-equally with Hebrew an official language in Tel Aviv. KILLEEN, Tel Aviv, go. So I was then in Tel Aviv for eighteen or nineteen months, whatever it was. I liked it a lot.

*Q: What were you doing, consular work?*

KILLEEN: Consular work. I was the number two man in a two-man American citizen services unit in the Embassy in Tel Aviv. It was my very first job in the real foreign service part of the Embassy. And I liked it because I liked the work, I liked the content, I liked the place, I liked the way things worked in Israel. Things actually functioned. And I liked it because it was an Embassy job, a real mainline Embassy job. There were some

adventures there, too, but... Though maybe this is an adventure of the foreign service of the kind that you are interested in. I was working the counter and there was another guy, another foreign service officer who was on a rotational program with us, who came up to the counter and said, “Tom, come on to the men's room with me.” “ There are a lot of people here; no, no can't.” He said, “No, you've got to come.” “For Christ's sake, I can't.” He says, “You've got to.” So we went, and went into the men's room. There was a small room and then there was a doorway with the john. The door to the john was closed with a rope hanging down over the end of it and I knew what was happening so I kicked the door open, mad as a hatter at this guy who could have done the same thing, and I said to myself “If the poor son-of-a-bitch is dead..”; he should have been knocking down this door. I got the door down, heard and felt the fellow clump, couldn't get in, kept pushing on him and jamming him up alongside the toilet bowl until I could get in, got the rope from around his neck, and saved his life. The rope that was hanging on the other side of the door had signs on it, “Let My People Go,” “Free the Jews from Soviet Domination,” things like that. Police came, the Israeli ambulance came and took the guy away, he was mentally disturbed, he was hospitalized, and a cloak of secrecy was dropped on the whole thing. My supervisor, a couple of days afterward, came to me and said that he personally wanted to thank me very much, the guy was going to survive and he was going to survive with all his marbles, although he didn't have many of them left; he was not going to be a vegetable. But there would never be anything documented about this because of the fact that it had taken place in the Embassy; the Embassy did not want any kind of publicity about the fact that there had been an attempted suicide on the premises. The Israelis, for their own purposes, didn't want any kind of publicity or any possibility of publicity about that particular protest being made in the U.S. Embassy. The fellow said he would never be able to mention it in an efficiency report. I accepted that; I was a young officer and I accepted that. I don't know whether I should have had a pat on the back or an “Atta boy” or what, if anything. Maybe I shouldn't have, maybe I should have been formally reprimanded... But, nothing! And I accepted that. It didn't occur to me at the time to say to the guy, “Just put your thank you in writing for me and classify it if you want.”

*Q: Yes, that is sort of odd. Were Americans getting into trouble in Israel, and how was it dealing with the Israeli authorities over the problems of Americans?*

KILLEEN: There were substantial numbers of tourists and there were young tourists. The Israelis in those days were, and I suspect still are, very worried about dope. They were most specifically worried, it sort of diminished them I always thought, that their success in battle, some of which they attributed to the fact that their Arab opponents were always stoned out of their mind, would be undermined if the drug habit found its way among their own troops. They were tough on dope. Some of the Americans that came to Israeli were interested in dope. There was some hashish available, even some heroin, not too much but there was some. The Israelis had tough laws. If I remember correctly, one of the laws was that any person within thirty feet, in any event it was space denominated in feet or meters, was deemed equally in possession of the dope. So that quite literally you could be standing on a street corner, or any place on the street, and if some guy ten paces away with whom you had no connection whatsoever was in possession of marijuana or hashish, you could be charged with possession. But there were some Americans that got in trouble. There was one kid who, at least he said and I suspect he showed me some evidence because I know I believed him at the time, had lost half his jaw. He said he had been in the Marines and had it shot off, just barely ticked with a .50 caliber bullet. When he went before an Israeli judge on a possession of hashish/marijuana charge, he had explained to the judge that that was the mitigating circumstance, that this whole Vietnam business had been so excruciating for him and that dope relieved him of is travails. And the judge, with tears, set him free.

The Israelis were very cooperative. Formally and officially they required themselves to notify foreign Embassies, which really meant us, if somebody were arrested, and to do so within twenty-four hours. They prohibited their police from having any direct police initiated contact with foreign embassies on the same matter. To the best of my recollection, if somebody was arrested and wanted to call the Embassy, they were free to use the phone.

One of the guys on the staff, an Israeli guy on the staff who among other things had been — do you know what a capo is, or was in the concentration camps?

*Q: Sort of like a trustee or something, with certain powers.*

KILLEEN: Yes. The guy had been a capo and he was on the Embassy staff, a peach of a guy. He was not proud of having been a capo, he did it to survive. He had, as far as I was able to figure out, established a personal relationship of trust and confidence with every police officer in the whole country, so that when any American was arrested, he got a phone call. Some of the phone calls came at the office, I guess most of the phone calls came at the office, but enough of them came at his house so as to create a patina for the police officers that it was just a phone call to a friend; he got a phone call whenever an American was arrested. It was nothing like what it became say in Mexico with Americans and dope, but there were substantial numbers. Others got in trouble, in trouble is not the right word, out of joint, because of the operations of Israeli law. The Israeli nationality law provided that any child born in Israel of a Jewish mother was automatically an Israeli citizen, period. And that every Israel citizen had a military obligation that required among other things, from age fifteen forward, that he get the permission of his local military commander to depart Israel. What would happen, especially in the summertime — and it was tough — some 15-year-old kid, generally of a more observant nature, (the Yeshiva students, those who wore the dark suits, the dark hats and who we in this country generally refer to as Orthodox Jews) would come to Israel for one reason or another, often having entirely to do with religious reasons or school reasons. When they were about ready to leave, usually on group flights, Israeli immigration people would say, “Let me see your permission from your local military commander to depart Israel.” The kids didn't have a clue as to what was being talked about. They did, however, understand when the immigration officer said, “Well you have to go and get it, and you can't leave now.” And they would call Mom, who would then call the Embassy. Sometimes Mama would call the Congressman who would then call the Embassy. Sometimes the kid himself would call the Embassy. But it was always the same, the Israelis would not allow them to leave until

they had this piece of paper, and the getting of the piece of paper was not so difficult. It cut in, under Israeli law, when somebody was 15, which is of sufficiently tender years so that it rattles a kid; and it rattles Mom and Pop and Congressmen and everybody along the line. And everybody justifiably so, except the Israelis, who knew, knew that the immigration officer would tell the kid to go get it and it would take a couple of days; maybe, with a lot of luck, a couple of hours. Now he was going to miss that flight unless he had been fortunate enough to get there at eight o'clock in the morning for an eight o'clock (PM ) departure, which hardly ever happened.

Then there was one case where an American guy — funny guy — who had spent some time living in Germany and when he finished his assignment in Germany, he got a repatriation loan and went back to the United States. When he was back in the United States, rather than repaying the repatriation loan, he stole a roommate's birth certificate and some other identification and got a new passport in that other person's name which he then used to go, maybe to go back to Germany, but in any event he came back to Israel on it. And he had his original passport in his luggage! During his incoming customs inspection the Israelis opened it up and discovered this healthy young man of military age, long time in Germany, coming to Israel with a brand new Land Rover, or something like that. The security bells started flashing, they didn't know what was going on, they didn't know who he was, they had no reason to believe anything that he was saying because he was in possession of credible evidence that contradicted itself. So they put him in jail; I think if I remember correctly that it was thirty days after they incarcerated him, incommunicado under their security laws, before they finally communicated to us that he was being held and asked us if we would help them sort out who he was. Some of that was my job because I was the passport officer as well. I saw him in jail; the eventual disposition of his case, I don't remember how long it was that he spent in jail, was that he was tried and convicted by the Israelis of some offense such as entering Israel under false pretenses or with false documentation, something like that. He was fined, the fine was just about what the brand new Land Rover brought at auction, plus the cost of his airplane

ticket back to the United States. I gave him a couple of bucks of walking around money for the day or two that he was half at liberty after time served, of course.

Oh, there was another guy, it was a funny case. I don't remember whether he was an American or not, but he was being held by the Israelis on the complaint of his wife because he refused to grant her a divorce. Under Israeli law the civil status was determined by the religious community to which one belonged. That particular fellow's religious community provided for divorce but only if initiated by the husband. Civil law provided that a guy could be locked up if he declined to give his wife a divorce and this guy had been in jail for several years if I remember correctly. I am saying to myself, “Was he an American?” I had dealings with the guy, but I don't remember whether, maybe he just used to hang around visitors to the jail when I was there visiting someone else.

*Q: That gives an idea of some of the problems that you had there. You left there in 1971 and you went to Bolivia, is that right?*

KILLEEN: I went to Bolivia.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

KILLEEN: I was the Commercial Attach#.

*Q: I tell you what we are going to do, we are going to sort of hop over rather quickly, or just plain hop over the time you spent in Bolivia from 1971 to 1974, Nigeria, 1974, Montreal — although there are things we should touch there we are going to concentrate on the refugee side of things; I think that makes the greatest sense. You were in Montreal from 1974 to 1977. You then went to Melbourne where you were from 1978 to 1979 and there you got involved in a refugee program, is that right?*

KILLEEN: Correct.

*Q: Could you tell me what you were up to?*

KILLEEN: It was an ordinary three year assignment to Melbourne. About the beginning of November or the tail end of October, the fall of 1979, when the boat people had been coming out of Vietnam, and to some extent out of Cambodia, and the real disturbances inside of Cambodia began to become visible, the Department sent out a call for volunteers, for people to go to Bangkok to work on the refugee problem. It was keyed to the people who were in Vietnam but it was in the context of all of the rest of this — I don't know how much of the animal activities of Pol Pot and his cohorts had yet come to the surface.

*Q: This was the Khmer Rouge?*

KILLEEN: The Khmer Rouge. It certainly was after the little war between China and Vietnam when the Chinese attacked the Vietnamese in retaliation for their incursion into Cambodia. Anyway there was this call for volunteers to go to Bangkok and I answered the call, and was a little surprised — I thought that there would be a lot of people answering the call — when quite promptly after I volunteered I got orders. I think, if I remember correctly, that the whole business from the time of the incoming cable calling for volunteers to my arrival in Bangkok was something like twenty-two days. Of course, it was a direct transfer — I had five direct transfers during the course of the time that I was in the foreign service. Five direct transfers and five hardship posts which I think is a lot more than most.

I got to Bangkok and found out what the job was: the then Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs had said before Congress that a program was in existence to move people directly from Vietnam to the U.S. so as to diminish the perception of people within Vietnam that they had no alternative but to take to the boats. The program may have existed in someone's mind but didn't really exist in any operating form, and the call for volunteers was a call to make real what the administrator of Security and Consular Affairs said — I am not sure whether he was then an Assistant Secretary, but anyway he was the head of it. Five of us assembled, and we were part of the Consular Section of AmEmbassy

Bangkok because it was the consular section who had been doing whatever had been done — not very much — to take care of these people in Vietnam. What had happened was that files, when the Embassy was closed in 1975, were sent to Bangkok.

The files were sent to Bangkok and then sometime after that, this I know only because of what I was told after I got to Bangkok, the word went out, aided and abetted by promises or semi-promises that were being made by the U.S. government in the Vietnamese community in the United States — these were mostly, but not exclusively, people who had departed from Vietnam when the Embassy departed, that 140,000 people who ended up in Guam and from there scattered throughout the United States — that there was a possibility of people getting their relatives out of Vietnam. What Vietnamese people in the United States did, some of whom had already naturalized, some of whom had left wives and children behind them in Vietnam, or husbands and children, was to do what they had been told to do. They had gone to the U.S. Immigration and filed immigration petitions for their relatives still in Vietnam to come to the United States. Some of them did it because they had a friend who was here or there. In any event, petitions were sent by U.S. Immigration to Embassies and Consulates around the world. Some of the Vietnamese who were sponsors of people still in Vietnam were spouses of foreign service employees or members of the U.S. armed services in various places around the world. Some of the people were spouses of people working in construction in Saudi Arabia, there were all sorts of these things. The Immigration had sent all these petitions to various places, mainly to Bangkok, and thousands and thousands and thousands had arrived. They had arrived in volume that totally overwhelmed the ability of the consular section in Bangkok to deal with them and there was almost no movement of people. What was happening with these things was that they were just piling up and piling up, being boxed up, sent off here and sent off there.

About a year before I got to Bangkok the consular section had moved from a building — an outlying building — to the Chancery, and when it did it left these files behind. Some work was done trying to organize these files in the conventional consular pattern for

immigrant files, although they were divided from the Thai cases because no need was seen to mix the two. When we got there we began to work on things; there was money and there was support and we could do things. I don't know who it was who had the bright idea, it was not me, but whoever it was, it was a marvelous idea: to organize the files and to deal with the people using computers rather than the 3x5 index card method of consular work...

*Q: This was early computer?*

KILLEEN: Early computer, this was '79, using the mainframe, big computers of the regional administrative center in Bangkok, which was very cooperative in time and schooling and this and that and the other thing.

*Q: Was Turk Lewis (?)...*

KILLEEN: Turk Lewis was one of them; another guy by the name of Ken Rosenberg. It was he and Turk Lewis. I can't remember who was the director of RAMC, that was the regional administrative maintenance center, at the time. I think both Ken and Turk were there TDY for the installation of the minicomputers that the Embassy had bought, the then new Wang minicomputers. They were as equally helpful as could be. Maybe Ken was the director of RAMC and Turk was there as the TDY guy. We got things computerized. It may have been a guy by the name of Lee Peters, Lee McCleod Peters, who was the supervisor of what we were then calling the Vietnamese Immigration Program, before we became the Vietnamese Processing Unit, that put this thing together. It may not have been Lee, it may have been the available wise men, not including me, who got this computerization thing put together. It may have been that Lee had an idea that computers could do it because he had worked in the finance center back in Washington, as a regular state officer he had worked in the finance center, and had an idea of what computers could do and sort of went to the RAMC people to see what they could do and everybody got interested in trying this new thing. Anyway we put together something that was pretty nifty as to what it would do

and how it would help in the processing of immigrant visa cases and eventually of refugee cases when the refugee act was passed. I am talking about everything from generating files and file labels, and post cards, and mailing labels, to actually doing shell outlines of immigrant visas — the typing portion so that what was needed to be individually typed was that much less. An awful lot was able to be put on in the shell including such things as the name of the beneficiary; obviously the computer couldn't affix a photo. The kinds of thing we were doing with the computer was terrific — generating telegrams.

*Q: At that time was there a connection within Vietnam to allow people to come out?*

KILLEEN: Yes, there was a theoretical connection and an actual connection. The United Nations had effected an agreement with Vietnam to provide for the orderly departure of people. Nobody really yet understood what that meant or how it would be implemented. An American citizen who was familiar with Vietnam, who spoke pretty good Vietnamese, came from one of the U.S. voluntary agencies — a guy by the name of Mike Meyers — and after familiarization with what we were doing and how we were going about doing things, he was seconded to the UNHCR to be in Hanoi, to be in effect the liaison man between the UN, the Vietnamese authorities and us, still in Bangkok. To answer the questions as to, where do we go next? How do we get there? We wanted to get out of Vietnam certain people who were connected with the United States. The Vietnamese were quite content to see substantial numbers of people in Vietnam depart, mainly their Chinese population. The two groups of people were by no means coterminous, they were not even close. Maybe our list at this point, for want of a better term it was a first take on what we had computerized, came up with thirty thousand people; the Vietnamese list had something like three hundred thousand people. We did a computer match of them and we found something like thirty of the people on our list were also, possibly, people on the Vietnamese list of people they were prepared to see depart.

Mike Meyers lasted about a year, which was all he had signed on to do, and he then went back to the United States. He was replaced by a fellow by the name of Mike Melia who

continued in Hanoi and then eventually moved down to Saigon in order to better liaise between us and the Vietnamese authorities. That happened as we were gradually moving toward the greater flow of people. In Saigon Mike Melia got involved in pre-interviewing people for us; where there was some sort of question or discrepancy or disparity or curiosity, or whatever, he would interview the person in Saigon, with, and only with, the consent of the Vietnamese authorities, to try and resolve these questions. I just described conditions as they existed from somewhere around December of 1979 through spring of 1981.

There was another channel, another operator; it was a curious thing and it was effective. What all the implications of things were I don't know and I suspect no one will ever know. It was possible for someone in Vietnam to get an exit permit from the authorities and to then go to the Air France office and book passage to the United States. The Air France office would ask their office in Bangkok whether or not we would process the person into the United States, which we would do if we could do it and we could do it if we had a file on the person, unless something dramatic appeared at the very last moment that changed things. The Air France office in Bangkok would then relay our okay to its office in Saigon which would then actually book the person out. The persons would come out of Vietnam, and again, this informal but effective mechanism got from the Thai authorities permission for the individuals to be in Thailand for up to fifteen days on transit status en route to their onward destination, wherever it was. It was not only the U.S. that people went to, some people went to France, some people went to other countries. I think both the Australians and the Canadians refused to use the mechanism, insisting that the individuals be interviewed by their own officers inside of Vietnam. But other countries did; I remember some people came out and went to the Ivory Coast in West Africa, and other countries. It was a very thin reed; it couldn't take care of many people in a week. I remember one time I got the job to provide credible answers to Air France channel as to why we could not accept an entire proposed shipment but had to work on an individual case basis. I had some expertise on the immigration law and I was to come up with a reason why their

consideration had to be deferred for two weeks; you know, “we'll come back to you on two weeks on these individuals.” The Vietnamese, if memory serves me on this, responded as one would expect, that in the next week's proposals were thieves, murders, liars, and perjurers; absolutely horrifying cases who if they had not been concentrated would have been rejected, deferred, so that they wouldn't have been heard from again. One case in that latter bunch was the product of a woman in New York who had, possibly for gain though there was no evidence of it but it was the only thing that one could think, manufactured family relationships with a whole bunch of people and was trying to bring them to the United States as her relatives when there was no way they could have been her relatives.

*Q: How would you find out, for example, whether people coming out from Vietnam had criminal records or not? Obviously the Vietnamese would have complete control over the documents they had.*

KILLEEN: That was the fallacy of the whole way of operating the way we did, or it touches upon it. Immigration to the United States, in the main, is governed by the existence of a family relationship to someone in the United States. What was being done was that people in the United States were being asked to document their relationship to an individual in Vietnam, and the individual in Vietnam was being asked to document his relationship to the person in the United States. Any old thing was being accepted as evidence of the claims. Now I say any old thing but it was not “any old thing”; old shoes, for example, were not accepted as proof of relationship, but lots of things were accepted. Of course, one really cannot rely on documentation anywhere, at any time, as proof positive of anything in any direction. But the immigration law provides that documentation be used in strong, direct, and immediate support of claimed relationships. The presumption upon which the immigration law rests is that from wherever people are coming there exists a U.S. consular officer who can, if necessary, at his call, go to the custodian of the records and ask to see the original records and verify it in fact. A claimed record was created contemporaneous with an event and does reflect the relationships claimed. Well we couldn't do that in

Vietnam, so everything, every scrap of paper, every piece of evidence, was deemed to be no better than secondary evidence. Things like police certificates were waived as being unreliable and, if I am correct in my memory, the possibility of waiving police certificates was in those days invited in the case of communist countries. In our own conversations about whether we should waive police records and military records for our customers it became a joke. We reasoned the proposition that the best we could possibly expect to get as either a police record or as a military record from the then authorities of Vietnam was, “This certifies that so-and-so is of a person of good character, we have no bad marks against his name, he is a good communist.” Which, of course, if it said he was a good communist it makes him ineligible as an immigrant, not as a refugee. So we waived police records as being meaningless; they are in fact waived in a lot of places. There were even some countries, earlier than that, that refused to produce them; there were other countries where they were deemed unreliable. It seems to me that when I was in Bolivia they never asked for police records there because, conventionally, when a new government came in — which statistically in Bolivia was about every nine months — the records of the preceding government were thrown out because they were about the new government, so there were no police records.

We used these documents, we tried to get the best documentary evidence that was available, we tried to use common sense about things. I think that later, after I left, from things that I heard, the administration of some of that got out of hand;, it got to believing that the documents were reliable. They forgot the fact that there was no American officer who could quite literally go to the custodian and verify it. And that is the crucial thing in the usability of documents, they are only there to document the claim.

*Q: Was there any attempt made to see if we could put an officer in? Later we did get officers in.*

KILLEEN: We expected to be in there, when I got there in November of 1979 — I am probably mingling too much my own reaction and what was the official expectation. When

I got to Bangkok I went into a hotel; it was a wonderful hotel in downtown Bangkok which the temporary housing allowance did not quite cover. That was okay, but part of the reason that I thought it was okay was because I did not expect to be in that hotel even for ninety days, that I would be in Vietnam before the ninety days were up. Then came the tragedy of Cambodia — President Carter's wife came to Bangkok and saw some of the sadness and horrors of Cambodia — and by the time it got to the policy level our hopes, which may have only been hopes but which I thought at the time and still think I remember correctly, that we were in fact going to Saigon to do our work, got scotched on the U.S. side. The legs got pulled out from under us on the U.S. side. The Vietnamese, we were told, had even prepared a house for us; that somewhat later got withdrawn, then, if I remember correctly, it was restored for that guy Tom Melia, the voluntary agency employee who was seconded to the UNHCR.

I never did go to Vietnam. About September of 1981 the program, under the auspices of the UNHCR, started actually to go. There were among us at the time, of the officers of what had become the Orderly Departure Program, three officers who spoke Vietnamese; by consensus we decided that they would be the ones who would go to Vietnam, with two of the junior officers bearing the brunt of it and the third guy, Lee Peters, would go also in his capacity as head of the program. A fellow by the name of Don Colin, who is dead now, became the head of the program; I don't know whether he ever did make a trip to Vietnam or not. We didn't want to confuse the Vietnamese by too many guys showing up. It certainly made a lot of sense to me, I didn't speak much Vietnamese at all, that the other three guys who spoke considerably more be the ones to go. By that time we were pretty much gun shy of the Vietnamese security considerations. Their security services were at least seen to be very active, were seen to have a lot of input into the decision making process and we didn't want to see anything come a cropper by inadvertence, especially by inadvertence on our part in something as stupid — very simply avoided — as having some new guy show up. Basically, it was two guys who went to Vietnam, in the time I am talking about, on an Air France flight in the morning, did their interviewing, and then exited

Vietnam with the people they had interviewed on the same aircraft, the same flight's return trip to Bangkok that afternoon. It was two guys who did most of the work with the third guy occasionally doing it; it was the two junior officers who did most of it.

When I got there we were the Vietnamese immigration processing officers. We changed when the new guys, the volunteers, arrived and became the Vietnamese Processing Unit when we were all in place. It was a very interesting organizational structure. Nominally we were part of the consular section, in fact we were, but we didn't have much to do with the consular section. There were five American officers and five or so representatives of U.S. voluntary agencies; American Red Cross was there, Catholic Relief Services was there and I don't remember who else was there. As staff we had a couple of people who were loaned to us by the consular section, we had a number of PIT employees — Part-time, Intermittent and Temporary — which meant that they didn't have a permanent job and were limited to less than a forty hour work week in those days. That latter part changed later to less than a full work year. Basically we were divided between officer type work and do clerical type work and it didn't make much difference where you came from, if you were supposed to do officer type work you did it and if you were supposed to clerical type work you did it. We had some clerks who were loaned to us by an outfit called ICEM, which was the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration and is now the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration. Some of the representatives of the voluntary agencies were there because they wanted to get the business — the camel with his nose already in the tent. There was a contract going to be let by the Department's Refugee Bureau to staff this refugee program and it was going to be a fairly substantial program. Once it was signed we ended up hiring on something like eighty-five people — that wasn't the first week or the first month or maybe not even the first six months. At one point after I left Bangkok it was something like one hundred and forty people and they had moved out of the old offices and into new offices.

What we were trying to do was get the files organized, to get into communication with the people who over, in some cases, years had expressed in one more or less compelling

form a desire either to go to the United States and settle there or to bring relatives from Vietnam to join them in the United States. Overwhelmingly it came from the United States, from U.S. citizens, who we felt had a right to expect that their government would listen to them. Since we were the designated hitters we were the guys to answer. There were thousands and thousands of immigration petitions, thousands and thousands of pieces of paper, most of it unorganized. That is what we proceeded to do, to organize this stuff; to create files according to the principal beneficiary, the head of the family, and to stuff into those file folders anything and everything that related to that same person or his immediate dependents and to ask the Vietnamese to let these people go. And to keep asking them and keep asking them. And to try at the same time to get in touch with the people who had communicated with us, in some cases this was five years before, to find out what the state of the play was, where they still were.

At the very beginning the administrative system was sort of nifty; it was before passage of the Refugee Act of 1980 and everything that was organized was organized in very much of an ad hoc method. After the passage of the act the U.S. government came in and started paying for everything. Before that pretty much the same thing had been accomplished without the expenditure of taxpayer money and had been accomplished, with considerable inefficiencies, because individuals in the United States who wanted relatives to join them would deposit funds with ICEM in New York City to cover the cost of the individual's care and maintenance in Bangkok while in transit and their passage to the United States; final payment due on their departure from Vietnam. After doing that for a number of months, maybe no more than about six months, ICEM found itself with something like a half a million dollars in the bank, and the interest on that half million dollars, in the high interest days of 1979, was becoming an embarrassment for ICEM. It didn't really feel it could just take the money. At the same time it certainly saw the possibility of that if say a hundred thousand people in the United States each deposited a thousand dollars with ICEM, all of a sudden there would be a lot of money and the interest on that would be probably sufficient to fund ICEM's operational budget. The U.S. government stepped in and said,

no need to do this any more, we will do it all on the basis of reimbursable loans to the beneficiaries. Then some of the funny, goofy stuff started to happen because for some of the people whom we were dealing with there was no need for them to be refugees at all and the Immigration Service, purely for internal operational reasons, wanted not to consider them as refugees but rather to consider them as immigrants, which status they were entitled to. Not the least among the reasons that the Immigration Service wanted to consider them as immigrants was that if admitted to the United States as immigrants right from the beginning they did not have to be admitted to the United States as immigrants a year after their arrival as refugees. They didn't need to go through the adjustment process. But the Refugee Bureau carried the day and people who were coming to the United States as immigrants with immigrant visas, some common sense prevailed, were treated as refugees for processing purposes so that everyone was signing the same promissory notes and the airline tickets were being paid out of the same fund, right across the board. I have the feeling I am going on in an unfocused way.

*Q: It shows some of the complexities of that operation. When you left there in 1982 what was your impression about how well it was working at that time?*

KILLEEN: It goes back to a question on which we touched earlier. It was hideously expensive and it was nonsensical; the way to do what we were trying to do was to do it with people on the ground. You do it with something like a consular section that is there and you hire people over whom you have immediate and direct control to do certain kinds of work whether it be typing or filing or whatever. You do not need a lot of people, you don't need anything like eighty-four or a hundred and forty people to do these kinds of things. You don't deal with people in the United States to have them deal with people in Vietnam and get from them in Vietnam stuff that they send to people in the United States to then send to you. You don't do all kinds of things like that. A little more than a year after I got there the program was dead in the water except for these few people who were dribbling out via Air France.

I had built up a lot of home leave over the years, I had gone on direct transfer from Melbourne to Bangkok, I was due for home leave the beginning of June. I said to my supervisor, “How about my taking as much as three months of home leave? We are dead in the water; I'll be mostly in the Washington area, if you need me to come back just send a message, I'll come back right away, no problem.” “Sure, sure, sure. No problem.” Toward the end of August I called, I was enjoying the home leave, I was enjoying the hell out of it. I called and I said — I made some inquiries in Washington and was reading the papers — “How's it going?” He said, “Still dead in the water.” I said, “How about if I stay and watch Walter Cronkite do his last election?” He said, “Sure, what the hell.” I was on leave for five months; that was a measure of how dead in the water the program was — this thing that in October, November, December had called for volunteers to deal with an emergency situation. I was the deputy, I was gone for five months. I got back and we disaffiliated with the consular section, the contract was about to be signed between the Refugee Bureau and the voluntary agency, Catholic Services. We moved into new premises because we needed more space than was available. The space into which we moved was the space that the consular service had been occupying before it moved out a year before I got there, in 1978. In 1981 the Vietnamese Processing Unit moved back in and in the process changed the name to the Orderly Departure Program. We then filled this place with people and with files. Now that was a long parenthesis from where?

*Q: You were talking about how things were going when you left.*

KILLEEN: When we moved we were still supposed to be a temporary operation and the selling point for us, for the State officers, who were the core of the Orderly Departure Program was that what we were doing was of a temporary nature. We had put up with cramped, cramped conditions in the consular section because we were temporary; when we moved into this other space to make room for the voluntary agency people we specifically chose very inexpensive, already owned Embassy space — a couple of bucks to spruce up and a couple of bucks to install air conditioning — because we were

temporary. Fifteen or so months later when I was leaving we were still temporary, but we were now at eighty-five people with less signs of moving to Saigon than there had been in the fall of 1979. By May of 1982 there was no reason whatsoever to believe that there would be — we weren't insisting it had to be diplomatic relations between the United States and Hanoi — some kind of arrangement, whatever kind of arrangement, that would permit us to do our work there where you could work in some kind of orderly fashion. It was in September of 1981 that the people, the human beings, had begun to flow out of Saigon in significant numbers; hundreds per week instead of hundreds per year. People were busy but they were working in such an indirect way. It was clear that there were possibilities, real possibilities, that instead of hundreds per week it could go to a thousand plus per week.

To do things the same way we were doing them in Bangkok, to try to deal with thousands of people per week, week in and week out, we didn't have a clue as to how many people would be needed. I guess they still haven't reached the point of thousands per week, but some of the reason why not was because from the U.S. side a damper was put on the number of people we would accept to come to the United States on an annual basis and that translates down to a per week basis. I am sure there were some weeks that they did get to a thousand after I left.

*Q: I thought we might move to one last bit. You left there in 1982 and served in Ghana for a couple of years and Caracas for a couple of years, and then you said you had something to do with the refugees in Mogadishu, from 1986 to 1988. What were you doing and how did you get involved in that?*

KILLEEN: I was the U.S. Refugee Coordinator in Mogadishu. The basic job there was rather different than the job in Bangkok. If anything it was closer to the job I did in Vietnam than the job I did in Bangkok. Basically I think it is a good idea, I don't know whether it still is the way we approach it, that the United States sometime by the mid-eighties, and perhaps even by the late seventies, as a matter of policy decided that what it would do

was support the activities of the UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in taking care of refugees around the world rather than trying to do it itself or in conjunction with allies. It would try to build up the strength and capacity and flexibility and utility of the UNHCR to deal with refugee situations wherever they might arise. By the time I came back into it in 1986, in a very real sense what my job in Somalia was was to check and make sure that the UNHCR there was doing what it said it was doing and that it was not UN officials or employees who had the gold bathtubs in their houses, and it was not the UN officials and their employees who were vacationing on the south coast of France, defrauding the public of the refugee benefits; that the refugee benefits were in fact getting to the refugees. I had a semi-simultaneous watching brief on the host country government to make sure they were not looting and pillaging.

*Q: Who were the refugees?*

KILLEEN: People who departed from Ethiopia and came to Somalia during and as a result of the second Ogaden war.

*Q: This being the area between Ethiopia and Somalia, an arid area?*

KILLEEN: Yes. I am being hesitant about that; Ethiopia claims the territory as theirs, the U.S. supports that claim. Somalia claims the territory as theirs and has received no support from any place else, but has accorded to the people there, citizenship. The first decision and maybe the only decision of the Organization of African Unity when it got organized thirty years ago, was that the colonial boundaries would remain in force until things got sorted out. Nobody has tried to sort things out. That is a colonial boundary. Those people came into Somalia as a result and aftermath of the Ogaden war.

*Q: How well did the High Commissioner's people do, did you feel?*

KILLEEN: I think they did a lousy job with a couple of exceptions. As for the exceptions I think they did heroic work, did outstanding work for which they don't get any credit, and

they should get credit. First of all, they kept as many as eight hundred and fifty thousand people, maybe a million people, alive; they kept them largely unexploited; they got them a lot better educated than they had been at home and that they ever had any reason to expect. What they didn't do was to either get them repatriated to their place of origin, which was impossible, or to get them integrated into the general Somali society, which would have been very difficult.

*Q: It being a tribal society and these people were not affiliated?*

KILLEEN: Worse, much worse than that. It being a tribal society and the people were part of the tribe; but they were a part of the tribe that had its own culture and ethics and turf and they were not on it. My driver in Somalia — it was hilarious, like a conversation out of the “Godfather” — tells me that my housekeeper is getting married. I said, “That's nice, who is she marrying?” “Some fellow, and he is very religious.” The Somalis are Muslims, and they are quite observant. “He's very religious, a very religious man.” I picked up on what he wasn't saying and said “Where is he from?” And he told me he was one of these Ogadeni people, but they met at church — as if it were some Italian kid marrying a Polish girl. This woman, who was from the same clan as my driver, was marrying into the Ogadeni clan! It wasn't so bad because he was very religious and they had met at church.

*Q: Maybe the UN was up against something that they couldn't crack?*

KILLEEN: Maybe they were.

*Q: Did you have any control over things? What did you do?*

KILLEEN: I reported and that was another area in which my manner of working was similar to the way that I worked in Vietnam. I reported as I saw things, I made recommendations as I saw things should be. I reported to the Refugee Bureau in Washington, copy to the Refugee and Migration Officer at the U.S. Mission to the UN in Geneva, who could and would drop things on appropriate people's desks in the headquarters of the UNHCR in

Geneva. I reported to the Refugee Bureau in Washington which, as a Board Member of the UNHCR could and would demand certain actions of the UNHCR, and if it was a matter of something like waste, fraud or real mismanagement, was in a perfectly sound position to make such demands. In that sense I had influence on what they were doing and how they were doing it. We weren't supposed to be adversaries, we were supposed to be in a collegial relationship; we were all trying to accomplish the same goals. I very much felt that part of the UNHCR's problem was an over-willingness to kowtow to the actual or perceived wishes of the U.S. in a particular matter. If I saw a particular approach or solution, I didn't mind if they disagreed with me. My judgment was that they did a lousy job in affecting the local resettlement of these individuals. I saw no other possibility, and I saw no reason whatsoever after ten years to dillydally around any longer. Get on with the business of trying to make it as attractive as possible to Somalia, to make these people an integral part of the society.

*Q: How about your relations with our Embassy there?*

KILLEEN: I was part of the Embassy; I had offices in the Embassy; my efficiency report was written by the DCM. I had my own budget and that allowed me considerably greater latitude than anybody. I had my own vehicles; if I didn't like the office space I was perfectly free to leave; I could have rented space elsewhere. If I didn't want to use the Embassy communications I could have used others; I could have used the postal telegraph system to send my reports to Washington via commercial cable; I could have used the existing telex system. I didn't have to deal with the Embassy, but of course I was a foreign service officer and of course I felt an obligation to be part of the mission. It was also, in dealing with the UNHCR and the Somali government, one more arrow in my quiver just to be able to say, “The Ambassador isn't going to like this when I tell him,” or that he will like this when I tell him. Of course I didn't always tell him, that goes without saying. I found the Ambassador very responsive.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador?*

KILLEEN: Frank Crigler. Very responsive when I asked him for certain kinds of help; maybe I could have asked for more — maybe if I had asked for more he would not have been as responsive. I always thought I got a full and fair hearing on anything I wanted to advance about U.S. relations with Somalia, with the region. Obviously my pulpit was the refugee situation.

*Q: Did you have much dealing with the Somali authorities themselves? How did you find them?*

KILLEEN: Yes. Bright, smart, very adept at dealing with a hostile environment and all environments are hostile. Very nationalistic, very self-assured when they were on grounds with which they were familiar, when they had reason to be self-assured, and when they were not, very free to ask for help, aid, assistance, advise. They were a very interesting people. You probably have buried in your memory that during the Vietnam War some of the vessels that carried goods into Hanoi flew Somali flags. The governing structure of Somalia from about 1969 forward was avowedly, publicly, Marxist, and the country was, in the words of a pretty senior Somali official to me across his desk, “Somalia was in the other camp.” Things changed, among the things that changed was that they saw that Marxism just didn't work. Africans are practical people. They felt themselves to be stabbed in the back by the Russians during the Ogaden war; every Somali knew the story, at best apocryphal, that what changed the president of the country's mind about dealing with the Russians was when they found an Ethiopian soldier dead on the battlefield and opened up his pack to find a can of Somali tuna which had been sent to the Soviet Union and the Soviets had turned right around and given it to the Ethiopians as field rations. And every Somali had noticed that during the ten years that the Soviets were there — just how accurate this number is I don't know — they had twenty-five thousand troops in Somalia, most of them were young men, and there wasn't a Russian baby to be seen in the country. The Somalis saw that the Russians kept their troops sequestered, kept them moving

around in bunches and put it down to simple racism, and it probably was a fair amount of that. It didn't bother than at all when the government decided to leave that camp.

*Q: Within two years of your leaving in 1988, the place blew apart. It is still going on today, probably one of world's nastiest civil wars. What was the situation around the time you left?*

KILLEEN: A fellow by the name of Mohammed Siad Barr# came to power by coup in 1969 in Somalia, displacing a semi-democratic parliamentary government; it wasn't too successful a government. That government proceeded to spend the next twenty years with its eyes firmly focused on two goals: One, maintenance of itself in power, and two, prevention of tribal, inter-clan, conflict within Somalia. Maybe even the second was nothing more than one of the latter ways to the first. The effect, in any event, was that twenty or more years of inter-clan stress did not get sorted out in a timely fashion in the ways that those kind of stresses can be and have been sorted out in tribal societies. In May of 1988 some of the outs of an “in” clan marched into a town in the north called Hargeysa; they were aided and assisted by members of other “in” clans and some “out” clans. They marched into Hargeysa and they took it and the government responded with armed force, by planes, by artillery, knocking the bejesus out of this town Hargeysa and driving out the attackers. The attackers were somewhat nationalistic in respect to the northern part of Somalia and they were somewhat idealistic in respect to the proper role of government and they wanted greater and greater participation of individuals both in political and economic life. They didn't want the same old men continuing to run affairs in Somalia who had been running them for twenty years. They wanted some change, some movement. What that did, and it was pretty much suppressed by the time I left Somalia, though it was still flaring, was to show the government had feet of clay, that the government was no where near as strong as it had appeared to be. Other clans, the outs from other clans then took up the cudgels. Today, from everything that I have read — and I have read pretty thoroughly what's available in the New York Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and the Washington Post, but there is not much coverage of these things — whatever had started

when I was there is over and is a settled question; it is now a self-asserted Republic of Northern Somalia, or Somaliland. The problem is not there, not Hargeysa, not Berbera, not the northern half of Somalia; it is the southern half of Somalia where group A is fighting group B; people from the larger clan affiliations. One larger clan is scrapping against another larger clan with the former Siad Barr# group, which is only roughly connected with some of clan B, being off in the wilderness, in effect licking its wounds.

The Somalis have a lot of experience with foreigners. Over the years they have sent a lot of people abroad for studies. A lot of Somalis live outside of Somalia; something like a third of the population of northern Kenya is Somali; there are numbers of these people that live in what the rest of the world considers to be Ethiopia; Somalis operate as truck drivers all up and down the east coast of Africa, they drive over-the-road trucks. They have a lot of sophistication — maybe forty percent of the hookers in Nairobi are Somalis. There is even a Somali woman who works in American motion pictures.

*Q: We have a fairly substantial Somali group here. Many are working as waitresses and sales clerks in some of the better places. They have worked their way up, they are obviously a cut above the normal refugee.*

KILLEEN: Exactly. They have information, they have dealt with foreigners. There was a story about somebody who had made a one day visit to Somalia and had exited making pronouncements; the pronouncements were absurd. Someone else had entered Somalia and he was “laughed at, scorned by the Somalis”, that was the story in one of the papers. There are a zillion little ports up and down the coast of Somalia that have been ports since the time of the Portuguese, since the time of Mohammed; to talk about an inability to deliver foodstuffs to Somalia, which a U.S. official did — some guy from the Foreign Disaster and Assistance Office went over there and spent a day and when he exited said we can't deliver foodstuffs to Somalia because the airports can't be secured. As far as the Somalis are concerned that is merely a lack of will and they are fairly quick to ascribe to a lack of will claims that something can't be done. Often I would agree with them that it is

a lack of will and nothing more than a lack of will. The business of foodstuff, quite literally there are scores of little ports, just send little boats and kick the stuff onto the shore, the people will come. It is horrifying what is going on there today. What is equally horrifying, to me, is the seemingly incompetent response of the world. We can't deal with this stuff.

*Q: I think we probably have too many things on our plate. Anyway it is one of those places that is being neglected. I would like to keep on going but I am looking at the time here. Why don't we call this off at this point, I think this is a good place to do it. This has been fascinating; this is about areas that we have not covered at all in any other oral histories. I thank you very much.*

KILLEEN: It has been my pleasure.

End of interview